

1. A method of developing an element list for intellectual property information, the method comprising the steps of
 - designating a source grouping containing documents having intellectual property information; and
 - generating a list of elements found in the documents in the source intellectual property information; and
 - providing at least a portion of the elements in the list as candidate search criteria for later use in searching.
2. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of selecting at least a portion of the elements as search criteria, and searching a plurality of documents including the documents in the source grouping based on the search criteria..
3. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 2, wherein the source grouping includes documents logically grouped together in a folder for storage in a memory unit.
4. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 2, wherein the source grouping includes documents being commonly assigned to the same entity.

5. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 2, wherein the source grouping designated in said designating step includes selected documents commonly classified in a system maintained by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

6. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 5, wherein the classification system is the classification of goods and services maintained by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

7. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 5, wherein said designating step further comprises the step of designating the source grouping as a field of search that includes intellectual property information in the form of patent publications commonly classified in select classes and subclasses, as maintained by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

8. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 2, wherein the list of elements generated in said generating step contains a list of words found in the source grouping of intellectual property information.

9. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 2, wherein the list of elements generated in said

generating step contains a list of concepts found in the source grouping of intellectual property information.

10. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 2, wherein the list of elements generated in said generating step contains a list of graphical elements found in the source grouping of intellectual property information.

11. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

receiving input data from a user over a network identifying the source intellectual property information for designation in said designating step;
outputting from a server the list generated in said generating step to the user over the network.

12. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 11, further comprising the step of:

retrieving the source intellectual property information identified in said receiving step from at least one remote database on the network.

13. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 12, wherein the input data received from the user in said

receiving step is a list of patent numbers identifying select patents as the source of intellectual property information, and wherein the network is the Internet.

14. A method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus, the method comprising:

- (a) designating a field of search based on selection of at least one of a plurality of classifications of an intellectual property classification system;
- (b) generating a list of words found in intellectual property information classified in the field of search designated in said designating step (a);
- (c) entering search criteria utilizing keywords; and
- (d) determining searchable elements related to keywords in the search criteria based on the list of words generated in said generating step (b).

15. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 14, wherein said generating step (b) further comprises the step of determining a frequency of occurrence of each listed word found in the intellectual property information associated with the field of search.

16. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 15, further comprising the step of:

(e) displaying, in the form of a word-frequency list, the list of words found in the intellectual property information classified in the field of search, wherein each listed word is associated with a corresponding frequency of occurrence of the listed word.

17. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 16, wherein said displaying step (e) comprises simultaneous display of the search criteria during operation of said entering step (c) and the display of the word-frequency list.

18. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 14, wherein said entering step (c) comprises entering keywords that formulate a search query; and wherein said determining step (d) comprises:

determining searchable elements related to select keywords in the search query by locating words on the list generated in said generating step (b) that are synonyms of select keywords in the search query; and

storing the synonyms thus determined in an accrued synonym list corresponding to the select keywords in the search query.

19. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 18, wherein said determining step (d) is automatically performed to determine synonyms for keywords in the search query.

20. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 18, wherein said entering step (c) further comprises the step of automatically incorporating into the search criteria synonyms from the accrued synonym list.

21. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 17, further comprising the step of:

(f) submitting the search criteria as a search query to the database.

22. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 21, wherein said submitting step (f) includes transmission of the search query to a remote database over the Internet.

23. In a search system for use in searching for intellectual property information, the improvement comprising an article of manufacture having stored thereon an executable program operative to effectuate searching for intellectual property information in connection with the search system, wherein the executable program is executed to perform the steps of:

(a) designating a source grouping comprising at least one document having intellectual property information;

(b) generating a list of words found in the at least one document in the intellectual property information within the source grouping designated in said

designating step (a); and providing at least a portion of the elements in the list for later use as search criteria.

24. The article of manufacture of claim 23, wherein the executable program is executed to perform the additional steps of

- (c) formulating search criteria utilizing input keywords; and
- (d) determining searchable elements related to the input keywords

in the search criteria based on the list of words generated in said generating step

(b).

25. The article of manufacture of claim 24, wherein said determining step (d) comprises:

determining searchable elements related to select keywords in the search criteria by locating words on the list generated in said generating step (b) that are synonyms of select keywords in the search criteria.

26. The article of manufacture of claim 25, wherein said designating step (a) further comprises:

receiving input signals from a user containing a selection of at least one of a plurality of classifications of an intellectual property classification system; and

designating the source grouping as a field of search based on the input selection from the user.

27. The article of manufacture of claim 26, wherein the classification system is the system used by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for classification of patents, and wherein the input signals contain a selection of a plurality of classes and subclasses that form the source grouping.

28. The article of manufacture of claim 25, wherein the source grouping includes selected intellectual property information stored in a database, and wherein said generating step (b) includes the step of retrieving the selected intellectual property information from the database and compiling the list of words found in the retrieved intellectual property information.

29. The article of manufacture of claim 25, wherein said formulating step (c) automatically adds to the search criteria the synonyms determined in said determining step (d) search criteria utilizing input keywords.

30. The article of manufacture of claim 29, wherein the executable program further comprises the step of:

outputting the search criteria to a user interface; and
accessing at least one remote database unit for intellectual property information corresponding to the search criteria.

31. The article of manufacture of claim 30, wherein said outputting step further comprises the step of simultaneously displaying a word-frequency list and the search criteria, wherein the word-frequency list is a list of all the words appearing in the source grouping, together with the frequency of occurrence in the source grouping.